

WHAT TO DO IN A CHEMICAL EMERGENCY, April, 2000

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INTRODUCTION

The Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA) of 1986 establishes requirements for Federal, State, and local governments, as well as industry regarding planning and "right-to-know" reporting on chemicals. This legislation builds upon programs aimed at helping communities to better meet their duties in regard to potential chemical emergencies. The right-to-know provisions help to increase public's knowledge and access to information on the presence and releases of chemicals in their communities. States and communities, working with facilities, can improve safety and protect public health and the environment. As part of this program, it is important that citizens be properly prepared to act in an emergency.

ACTIONS YOU MIGHT TAKE

In case of a chemical emergency, you might be asked to take one of three actions: evacuate, shelter-in-place, or protect your breathing. Be sure you understand these procedures. If you have neighbors who are hard of hearing, do not see well, or need additional assistance, please help them. Be sure they know what actions to take.

IF YOU ARE TOLD TO SHELTER IN PLACE

You should protect yourself inside your house or other building. This is a good action to take if there is a short release or a small amount of material in the air.

If your children are in school, they will be protected by officials.

TO PROTECT YOURSELF:

Go inside if you are outside.

When inside, stay inside until your radio or TV says you can leave safely. This is most likely to be no more than a few hours, rather than a day or more.

Close all doors and windows; taping cracks or openings provides more protection.

Turn off heating or cooling systems.

Do not use fireplaces. Close the dampers.

Listen to your radio or TV for info.

IF YOU WITNESS A HAZARDOUS MATERIALS EMERGENCY

Evacuate the area immediately.

Call the local fire or police department, or emergency management office to report the emergency.

Do not attempt to put out fires with water or rescue injured persons. Trained individuals are available for that.

IF YOU ARE TOLD TO EVACUATE?

Move to a place designated by public officials. Follow these steps to be ready:

Stay as calm as you can. You should already know where to go and what to take.

Gather items of need for your family. Pack only what you will need most. Take these along if you can.

This brochure.

Extra clothing.

Eyeglasses, dentures, drugs, other important medicines, and first aid kit.

Baby supplies.

Portable radio and flashlight.
Checkbook and credit cards, driver's license or other I.D.

Remember to do the following:

Turn off the lights, appliances, heating, cooling, or ventilation systems.
Leave freezer / refrigerator on.
Lock your house.
Do not go to your children's school to pick them up. That could delay their move to a safer place. Officials will take special care of your children.
Do not try to call your children's school. The phone lines will be needed for official business.
Do not use your phones unless you or someone else you know is injured or too sick to do what is needed. If you must use the phone, keep your call very short.

This brochure and your radio and TV will tell you what actions to take. Read it through and be sure you understand it. Clear up questions you have now, not later.

Do not listen to rumors. Listen to your radio or TV for information.
Use only one car (or vehicle) for your family.
Please check to see if any neighbors need a ride.
Keep your car windows and air vents closed.
Listen to local stations for reports about your route and other information.
Drive safely, traffic will be heavy. Officers along your route will help you.
Do not worry about your property while you are away. Local officials will protect it.
If you need a ride, try to go with a neighbor, a friend, or a relative. If you can't, officials will provide transportation.
If children have to leave their schools for a safer place, they will be the first to move. Teachers and adults will take them to a safe place. You will be told by radio or TV where to pick up your children.

IF YOU ARE TOLD TO PROTECT YOUR BREATHING:

You should cover your nose and mouth with a damp handkerchief, towel, or other cloth to protect your breathing.
Fold the cloth over several times.
Close the windows and doors if you are in a building or a car.
Turn off heating or cooling systems.
Listen to your radio or TV for info.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU KNOW THERE IS A RELEASE AND IT'S COMING TOWARD YOU:

You should be prepared to leave the area if directed by the authorities - police, fire, or emergency officials.
Be prepared to protect yourself, wherever you are, if evacuation isn't possible or necessary.

Studies have shown that even poorly sealed buildings provide some protection from gas entering the building. Those results would indicate that if you are outside, you should enter your house, nearby public building, or your automobile.

Once inside, close off all outside ventilation, such as the air conditioner or windows.
Taping cracks or openings in doors will increase protection.
Stay inside and wait for the cloud to pass.
If gas is entering the building, and you are in danger, a wet cloth or towel over your nose and mouth will act as a filter and offer some protection.
Staying inside is safer than trying to outrun a release.
If you are outside and can't possibly get inside, move crosswind (in a direction so that the wind is blowing from your left to right or vice versa, but not into your face or from behind). This offers the best advantage for getting out of the path.
Remain calm and receive instructions before taking any further actions.

For more information, contact your local or State Emergency Management Office, or your local Health Department.